Cybernetic pluralism in an emerging global information and computing ethics

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*This chapter traces the development of an emerging global information and computing ethics (ICE), arguing that ethical pluralism – as found in both Western and Asian traditions – is crucial to such an ICE. In particular, ethical pluralism – as affiliated with notions of judgment (*phronesis *in Aristotle and the* cybernetes *in Plato), resonance and harmony – holds together shared ethical norms, as required for a shared global ethic, alongside the irreducible differences that define individual and cultural identities. It is demonstrated how such pluralism is already at work in both contemporary theory and praxis, including in development projects in diverse cultures. The chapter concludes with a number of resonances between this global pluralism and African thought and traditions, which thus suggest that such a pluralism may also succeed in the African context, as diverse African cultures and countries seek to benefit from information and communication technologies while maintaining their cultural identities.*

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Introduction

I begin the first section of this chapter[1] with sample definitions of computer ethics, information ethics and professional computing ethics as initial definitions that, as was appropriate at the time of their crafting, are addressed to specialists and professionals. But given that "information processing", including communicating via computer networks, is now undertaken by over one billion people on the planet, we need an information and computing ethics (ICE) for "the rest of us".

This global reach further requires an emerging ICE that conjoins globally shared norms and values with the values, norms, traditions and practices of diverse cultures – cultures that are irreducibly different from one another, and must remain so for the sake of preserving their identity. I then suggest that how we develop such a global ICE further depends on whether we will seek out simply commonalities and pragmatic agreements based on shared economic interests, for example, and/or, in the words of the Japanese comparative philosopher Nishida, if we seek to know "the Other" through a *resonance*, a structure of connection alongside the irreducible *differences* defining individuals as distinct from one another. Such resonance intersects with various forms of *ethical pluralism* that meet, I argue, the central requirement of a global ICE to conjoin shared norms with the irreducible differences defining both individual and cultural identities.

(We will see in greater detail in the third section how this pluralism seeks to go beyond the pluralisms developed in contemporary political philosophy by John Rawls and Charles Taylor. In the fourth section, the conclusion, I return to how such resonances entail greater ethical demands on us than the quest for commonalities.)

The second section is a careful examination of *ethical pluralism,* beginning with its Western roots in what I call Plato's *interpretive pluralism* and then Aristotle's notion of *pros hen* or focal equivocals. These pluralisms further require *phronesis*, Aristotle's conception of practical judgment as precisely the ability to discern how shared norms may indeed be understood and applied in diverse ways in diverse contexts. *Phronesis,* in turn, derives from Plato's use of the *cybernetes*, the pilot or helmsman, as an exemplar of ethical judgment that emphasises the capacity for *ethical* self-correction – the basis, nicely enough, for *cybernetics* as a central concept in computer science. Happily, both religious traditions (including Islam) and Eastern traditions (including Confucian, Daoism and Buddhism) likewise develop similar notions of judgment, ethical pluralism and the core metaphors of harmony and resonance that describe pluralism's conjunction of shared norms and diverse interpretations, as made possible by judgment.

Hence, such notions and metaphors may serve as a framework for a global ICE – i.e. one that brings together East and West, African and indigenous traditions, etc. – that sustains irreducible differences alongside shared norms. In fact, such pluralism can already be seen in the contemporary ICE theories developed by Terrell Ward Bynum and Luciano Floridi.

In the third section we see, moreover, that such ethical pluralisms are instantiated at the level of praxis in contemporary ICE in several examples, including a procedural approach to determining what "emancipation" might mean in diverse cultures (Stahl) – an understanding supported by a striking example of how women in Jordan have learnt to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) for an emancipation that emerges from, and meshes with, their particular

[1] The original paper was originally developed out of a lecture delivered in my capacity as an Information Ethics Fellow (2006–2007) at the Centre for Information Policy Research (CIPR), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, on 13 November 2006. I have subsequently expanded and modified it in the light of various presentations and discussions held during the first African Information Ethics Conference, "Ethical Challenges in the Information Age", on 5–7 February 2007, Pretoria, South Africa. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr Elizabeth Buchanan, Director of CIPR, for the opportunity to first develop this paper, as well as to Drs Buchanan and Johannes Britz, Dean and Professor, School of Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, for their kind permission to develop this paper for this venue. In addition, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the members of my Theme Group, "Cultural diversity and development" – Sarah Kaddu, Chibueze Udeani, Retha Claasen, Ismail Abdullahi, Anthony Löwstedt, Coetzee Bester and Jill Maimela – who graciously discussed, tested and confirmed the central ideas proposed here.

cultural contexts (Wheeler); an open source software developed for the Indymedia movement – one that, as open source, allows itself to be modified to meet local interpretations of open access and free speech (Van der Velden); a pluralistic framework for notions of "privacy" and affiliated codes and laws regarding data privacy protection in both Western and Eastern countries (Ess); and an exploration of Theravadan and Mahayana Buddhist approaches to privacy vis-à-vis modern Western notions of individual privacy (Hongladarom).

This last exploration, finally, contributes to the sort of pluralism that Soraj Hongladarom and I seek to develop – one that, in contrast with Rawls' notion of overlapping consensus, extends beyond the boundaries of liberal states and further allows participants in a dialogue intending to develop a global ICE to "bring their specific backgrounds to the table" (Hongladarom & Ess, 2007:xv).

The fourth section then seeks initially to outline some specific obligations and duties for a global ICE, beginning with the primarily negative rights and duties affiliated with seeking commonalities in our online cross-cultural engagements (e.g. do not violate another person's right to data privacy), and then moving to possible, primarily positive rights and duties entailed by seeking to meet "the Other" online in *resonant* ways structured by judgment and interpretive pluralism. Unfortunately, what we must do to establish trust and deal with ambiguity as embodied beings may not always "translate" easily to online venues. But we may nonetheless, as Hongladarom argues, positively cultivate the sort of character and compassion that would prevent violation of rights (e.g. to privacy) by reducing our egoistic self-interest and greed. More broadly, we will need to be more aware of how evil – defined in part as the systematic dehumanisation of "the Other" – may be at work within the very theoretical frameworks we seek to use to foster social justice in a global ICE (Kvasny). We will further need to explore how diverse religious traditions may be positively incorporated into a global ICE that seeks to preserve cultural identities (Bhattarakosol).

Finally, a number of important resonances between African thought and Western and Eastern traditions already woven together in a global, pluralistic ICE suggest – if only in an initial way – that a pluralistic approach to the development of an African information ethics may likewise succeed in connecting African ethics with shared, global norms, while simultaneously sustaining and fostering the irreducible differences that define African cultures and traditions.

What is ICE?

Initial canonical definitions

Computer ethics, as one of the foremost pioneers in this field, Terry Bynum, has carefully documented and explored, begins in the English-speaking West with the work of Norbert Wiener (1948; see Bynum, 2000; 2001; 2006). We will see later on that Wiener's work – specifically, his effort to define computer ethics in terms of using our technologies to contribute to human *flourishing* – certainly remains pertinent. In particular, Bynum builds his understanding of computer ethics in part on the work of James Moor (1985: 266), whose famous paper, "What Is Computer Ethics?" includes the observation that problems arise in relation to computers because of "policy vacuums" (the lack of policies, guidelines, etc.) in the face of especially the new ethical issues and social impacts of computing technology.

For their part, Bynum & Rogerson (1996:119) subsequently offered the following definition of computer ethics, as based on both Wiener and Moor:

> *Computer ethics identifies and analyzes the impacts of information technology upon human values like health, wealth, opportunity, freedom, democracy, knowledge, privacy, security, self-fulfilment, and so on.*

Information ethics

Intersecting the focus on computers and computer networks as specific forms of technology is a second definition – one that emphasises rather the primary fact that computers are used as information processors. While the exact definition of information – especially in contrast with what many of us take to be different types of knowledge most broadly (including data, knowledge and wisdom) – is a matter of dispute (e.g. Zins, 2007), if we agree in an operational way that what computers process is information,

then information ethics "comprises all the ethical issues related to the production, storage, access, and dissemination of information" (Hauptman, 1991:121).

Professional ethics

Of course, the first people who really had to wrestle with these ethical issues were, as Wiener illustrates, computer scientists. Over the years, professional organisations such as the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and IEEE have developed statements of the ethical obligations and standards of the professionals responsible for the design, deployment and use of these technologies. So, for example, the ACM (1992) code of ethics includes the following:

As an ACM member I will ...

1.1 Contribute to society and human well-being
1.2 Avoid harm to others
1.3 Be honest and trustworthy
1.4 Be fair and take action not to discriminate
1.5 Honor property rights, including copyrights and patent
1.6 Give proper credit for intellectual property
1.7 Respect the privacy of others
1.8 Honor confidentiality

The code includes still more specific professional responsibilities, such as:

2.1 Strive to achieve the highest quality, effectiveness and dignity in both the process and products of professional work
2.2 Acquire and maintain professional competence
2.3 Know and respect existing laws pertaining to professional work
2.4 Accept and provide appropriate professional review
2.5 Give comprehensive and thorough evaluations of computer systems and their impacts, including analysis of possible risks
2.6 Honor contracts, agreements, and assigned responsibilities
2.7 Improve public understanding of computing and its consequences
2.8 Access computing and communication resources only when authorized to do so

To be sure, such ethical norms and obligations are crucial. But, as is both clear and appropriate to their origins and intended audience, these norms are addressed primarily to computing professionals; i.e. those specialists and experts in the various fields surrounding computation as an intellectual, technical and/or business enterprise, including computer scientists, systems administrators, etc.

Obviously, as the use of computers and computer networks to communicate globally, as well as to process information in increasingly diverse ways (e.g. from word processing to online banking; the various forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC), including email, instant messaging, chats, social network sites, etc.; art and entertainment uses, including audio and video production and distribution; shopping; religion online [Ess, 2007a]), has become more and more a requirement and presumed feature of everyday life in the developed world. More and more of us who are not computer specialists face an increasing range of ethical issues and difficulties that are not directly addressed by a professional ethics that is powerfully but narrowly focused on the needs and experiences of the comparatively few technical experts.

Ethics for the rest of us?

As Barbara Paterson (2007:153) points out:

> *Deborah Johnson (1999) predicts that because the majority of moral problems will be computer ethics issues, computer ethics will cease to be a special field of ethics (Bynum, 2000). Kristina Gòrniak-Kocikowska (1996) predicts that the computer revolution will give rise to a revolution of ethics and that computer ethics will become a global ethics relevant to all areas of human life. Bynum and Rogerson (1996) and Moor (1998) suggest that the second generation of computer ethics should be an era of global information ethics.*

To say it again: within a very short period of time, ICTs have become increasingly ubiquitous in the developed world – so much so, in fact, that they now have become so interwoven in our lives that we are no longer so astonished, mystified and occasionally terrified by them. Rather, they are increasingly becoming like refrigerators and automobiles – technologies that work largely in the background rather than the foreground of our lives. And as we will soon see below, ICTs are likewise diffusing rapidly throughout the world. While in many places they are not likely to become so ubiquitous in the ways that we now

take for granted in the developed world, ICTs now connect over one billion people on the planet. But this means, in turn, that we all use – or will need to use – ICE every day.

To my knowledge, however, such a "pedestrian" – rather than specialised and professional – ICE is only now starting to emerge. Certainly, there are many excellent texts and courses available for teaching ICE (e.g. Tavani, 2007) but, to my knowledge at least, these remain largely in the province of specialised courses in the curricula for computer science and library science. At the same time, at least to my knowledge, the topics and problems of information ethics are not widely represented in the various anthologies used to teach ethics and applied ethics in the US, for example Boss (2005).

Therefore, a primary goal of contemporary ICE is to attend and respond to the multiple ethical issues that confront more or less everyone who uses a computer to receive, manipulate, present and distribute information. The list here is extensive:

- Simple netiquette and related politeness rules for using email and participating productively in listserves, chatrooms, instant messaging, etc.
- Ethical dimensions of social networking software, such as Facebook, including how far such communications can be considered private and/or protected under free speech, etc.
- Ethical dimensions of blogs and blogging, such as what may be fairly cited without permission, what requires permission, etc.
- Posting photos and videos online – with or without restrictions, with or without permissions, etc.

The list also includes "big ticket" items, such as:

- Privacy issues, both local, as in the post 9/11 US, and global, as different countries and traditions establish different expectations regarding privacy and correlatively different codes and laws for data privacy protection
- Copyright/copy left and intellectual property rights
- Cross-cultural communication online: freedom of self and cultural expression vis-à-vis "computer-mediated colonisation", violating and/ or offending important cultural and religious taboos, etc.
- Various issues surrounding such practices as hacking, surveillance, cyber-stalking, "cyber-bullying", sexual predation and abuse
- The digital divide and related issues of social justice, etc.

If anything – as ICTs continue to diffuse around the world and throughout our lives, both individually and collectively – we can expect the list of ethical issues to expand proportionately.

A global information ethics? Basic requirements

It is helpful to begin with a quick review of the dramatic scope and speed of global ICT diffusion. The Internet, beginning with 213 hosts in 1981, counted approximately 376 000 hosts by 1991. At the time of writing (April 2007), there were more than 433 193 199 hosts (ISC, 2007). Building on the Internet, the World Wide Web was first instantiated in 1991 and expanded to include just 26 servers worldwide by November 1992 (BBC, 2006). Currently, there are over 113 658 468 websites online (Newman, 2007).

Culturally, as late as 1998, the Internet and the Web remained solidly in the cultural domains of its English, European and US inventors – indeed, about 84% of Web users were located in the US (GVU, 1998). Now, a scant eight years later, over one billion (1 114 274 426) persons throughout the world have access to the Web. Of these, Asian users constitute 35.8% of the Web population, while Europeans make up 28.3% of world users and North Americans only 20.9% (IWS, 2007).

For our purposes, there are at least two immediate consequences of this global diffusion. The first is usually couched in terms of the digital divide: the distribution of ICTs globally generally follows pre-existing structures of wealth, power and status, both between nations and within nations. Certainly, many early proponents of the so-called Information Revolution or the "electronic global village" ardently hoped and argued that ICTs would bring about greater freedom, equality and economic opportunity – and certainly, we can find heartening examples that support this hope. By and large, however, it appears that ICTs work here – as they do elsewhere – as something like social and political amplifiers. Because of the associated economic start-up costs and, equally importantly, what Bourdieu (1977) has helpfully identified in terms

of social capital, the poor and socially marginalised face often insurmountable obstacles to joining the so-called revolution. Crudely, but importantly, here – as elsewhere – the poor stay poor and the rich get richer … [3]

The second has to do with matters of cultural identity, diversity and the irreducible differences that establish and define the multiple lines between "us" and "them". Briefly, as Hongladarom (2007) points out, until relatively recently, computer ethics – in parallel with ICTs themselves, as emerging primarily in the Western/North/English-speaking world – have remained largely the work of Western ethicists. Of course, contemporary Western ethical traditions are themselves diverse and in some ways irreconcilable – to name only some of the most prominent, for example:

- Utilitarianisms
- Deontologies
- Virtue ethics
- Feminist ethics and ethics of care
- Environmental ethics

Nonetheless, these ethical traditions rest upon shared assumptions – first of all, regarding the nature and reality of the individual, and related assumptions about the relative role and importance of the community and other forms of relationship to the identity and function of the individual.

As we are about to see, these and related contemporary Western assumptions come to the foreground as we consider non-Western ethical traditions, such as:

- African thought
- Confucian traditions
- Buddhist traditions
- Indigenous traditions, and so forth

That is, as we undertake the work of comparative philosophy, both the shared commonalities and irreducible differences between these diverse traditions become clear and explicit. So, for example, we will see that many of these non-Western traditions share an understanding of the individual as a relational being, one whose identity and reality essentially turn on his or her relationships with others in the larger community (and, perhaps, nature and/or divinity itself). So Paterson (2007:157–158), drawing on the work of Menkiti (1979) and Shutte (1993), suggests that in general:

> *In African philosophy, a person is defined through his or her relationships with other persons, not through an isolated quality, such as rationality.*

This means in turn that:

> *African thought sees a person as a being under construction whose character changes as the relations to other persons change. To grow older means to become more of a person and more worthy of respect.*

Finally:

> *In contrast to Western individualism and its emphasis on the rights of the individual, Menkiti (1979) stresses that growth is a normative notion: "personhood is something at which individuals could fail" (p. 159). The individual belongs to the group and is linked to members of the group through interaction; conversation and dialogue are both the purpose and activity of the community.*[4]

Hence, these irreducible differences between cultures are not trivial. Rather, they work to define the differences between cultures – and thereby between individuals as shaped by these cultures. To say it differently, these foundational differences are essential to defining our identities as cultures and members of cultures.

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[2] The digital divide was a primary theme, of course, in our conference, beginning with its central importance for Topic Three, "Development, poverty and ICT". In addition, Sarah Kaddu (2007) documents in great detail how various deficits in social capital led to a number of very regretable failures in ICTs for Development (ICT4D) projects in Uganda – just one example, unfortunately, of a very broad trend in ICT4D work.

[4] In his keynote address opening the first African Information Ethics Conference, Rafael Capurro (2007) helpfully focused on *ubuntu* as a particular expression of what we may now think of as the more communitarian or collective emphasis described here by Paterson, characteristic of not only African traditions but, as we will further see, also of Buddhist and Confucian traditions, as well as others around the world. I will return to the implications of these linkages for the development of an *African* information ethics by way of conclusion. Linux users will recognise *ubuntu* from the (excellent) Ubuntu distribution of the Linux OS (see www. ubuntu. com).

I will assume here (although I have argued elsewhere – Ess, 2007b) that persons and cultures have a basic right to identity. Such rights are spelled out, for example, in UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. And, as Rafael Capurro (2006) points out, the Declaration of Principles of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 explicitly addresses "Cultural Diversity and Identity, Linguistic Diversity and Local Content" in Point 8, including the affirmation that:

> *52. Cultural diversity is the common heritage of humankind. The Information Society should be founded on and stimulate respect for cultural identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, traditions and religions, and foster dialogue among cultures and civilizations. The promotion, affirmation and preservation of diverse cultural identities and languages as reflected in relevant agreed United Nations documents, including UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, will further enrich the Information Society.*

Alongside these sorts of commitments to honour and foster the irreducible differences that define our individual and cultural identities – as we seek to develop a global ICE – we must do so in ways that simultaneously foster and sustain a shared ethos or set of ethical practices. That is:

> *... just as we require commonly shared technical standards if our computers are to "talk" with one another around the globe; and just as we require a common language, a shared lingua franca, if we are to be able to communicate and mutually understand one another ...*

So it seems that in an "electronic global village":

> *– better, an electronic global metropolis (Hjarvard, 2002), in which, as we have seen, ca. 1/6th of the world's population are now able to communicate with one another (more or less) directly and instantaneously – we will also require a shared ethics that guides our uses and expectations surrounding the use of ICTs.*

This requirement for a shared ethos, we may notice, is itself an assumption shared by all major ethical traditions. That is, every major ethical system, both East and West, assumes that a shared ethics or ethos is necessary, however much they may vary as to the content of that shared ethos. So, for example, deontologists, especially following the German philosophers Kant and Habermas, take up a rationalist emphasis on (near-absolute) rights, duties, etc., as universal – an emphasis further embedded in such documents as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). As Bernd Carsten Stahl (2004:17) goes on to observe, French moralism in Montaigne and Ricouer is by contrast teleological, i.e. oriented towards the goal or *telos* of discerning and doing what is necessary for the sake of an ethical and social order that makes both individual and community life more fulfilling, productive, etc., through "the propagation of peace and avoidance of violence".

Still again, ethics in the Anglo-American world tends to emphasise a utilitarian interest in "the greatest good for the greatest number" as the primary ethical norm towards which all actions should aim, while various communitarian views emphasise the good of the community in still other ways, e.g. the Confucian emphasis on communal harmony (*te*), the African emphasis on community wellbeing, the Aristotelian emphasis on harmony, development of the *polis*, etc., and the Buddhist emphasis on compassion as a practice essential both to individual enlightenment and community peace and harmony.

In addition to what we might think of as a formal requirement of an ethical system – i.e. this aim towards a shared set of norms, procedures, etc. – we should note that there are also contents shared among the major ethical systems and religions of the world. So, to begin with, we can find a version of the "Golden Rule" in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), Confucian thought (e.g. *Analects* 15.23), Taoism, Shinto, Hinduism (*Mahabharata 5:1517)*, Jainism, Sikhism and Native American traditions (Granoff, 2003). Other candidates for "content universals" include those offered by Tu Wei-Ming: the Golden Rule; a sense of justice/ fairness; rules of civility; a notion of wisdom as an important goal in individual development and as a respected quality; and trust as a basic social glue.

Finally, the venerable James Moor (2002:204; cf. Adam Moore, 2003 – both cited in Hongladarom, 2007:110) argues that all human groups focus on the values of "life, happiness, freedom, knowledge, ability, resources, and security" – and thereby privacy.

A global ICE: Ethical pluralism and "intercultural information ethics"

These two requirements then lead directly to what many of us now regard as a central issue in ICE: if an information ethics is to be genuinely global – i.e. achieve normative legitimacy among a wide diversity of cultures and ethical traditions – such an ethics must:

- Address both local and global issues evoked by ICTs, CMC, etc.
- Function in ways that both sustain local traditions, values, preferences, etc.
- Provide shared, (quasi-) universal responses to central ethical problems

Or, as Soraj Hongladarom (2007:115) puts it more succinctly, specifically with regard to the issue of privacy and in the light of the radical differences between Eastern and Western conceptions of privacy:

> *The task for the theorist is then to search for a system of justification of privacy which respects these diverse cultural traditions, but at the same time is powerful enough to command rational assent of all involved.*

Ethicists and philosophers will recognise that the challenge of creating such a global ethics is in fact an ancient one – and in a little while I will explore two ancient solutions to the problem, namely Plato's interpretive pluralism and Aristotle's subsequent *pros hen* or "focal" pluralism.

In the context of ICE, our colleague Rafael Capurro articulated this difficulty very early on. As Barbara Paterson (2007:162) points out:

> *The pressing issue is not providing access to technology in order to turn more people into receivers of information that was created elsewhere and may not be useful to them, but, as suggested by Capurro (1990), it is to find ways that African countries can promote their identities in information production, distribution, and use. In terms of a global information ecology, he stresses the importance "of finding the right balance […] between the blessings of universality and the need for preserving plurality" (Capurro, 1990).*

Preserving this plurality – in my terms, the irreducible differences that define individuals and cultures – is thus one of the central tasks of what Capurro (2005) has subsequently come to call "intercultural information ethics" (IIE).

One of the conditions of developing such an IIE or global ICE, finally, is that these ethics must emerge from cross-cultural dialogues, marked by a fundamental respect precisely for the irreducible differences that define our cultures and our identities. As Paterson (2007:162) points out, "a great conversation is necessary that transcends limitations of discourse among members of particular social groups" – a conversation that has been called for by Berman (1992), Moor (1998), and as early as 1990 by Rafael Capurro.

Variations on the theme: How far ought we go towards "the Other"?

As I have explored these matters over the past few years, it has become increasingly clear to me that we must ask still one more question before proceeding to develop a global ICE – and that is: How far do we want/need/ought to go to meet "the Other"? This question is central, because our responses to it will determine how far we may remain satisfied with an ethics that emphasises shared assumptions and obligations only – and how far we may be willing, if not required, to take up additional ethical obligations necessary in order to honour and foster the irreducible differences that define our cultural and individual identities.

In the following, I begin to sketch out the characteristics of each of these responses. In the concluding section, I will return to these two possible approaches to ICE and summarise a number of concrete suggestions, especially regarding the second possibility (what we will see referred to in terms of a "resonance ethics" or Good Samaritan ethics) that emerge in some of the most recent work on ICE.

Minimal standards – emphasis on commonalities

Briefly, we can identify what might be thought of as a set of minimal ethical standards for the electronic global metropolis – ones that emphasise commonalities more than differences for the sake of largely pragmatic economic interests.

As an initial example, Johnny Søraker (2006) has pointed out that pragmatic arguments – i.e. those

arguments that appeal to our shared economic interests – are strong candidates for inclusion in a global ICE, precisely because they largely bypass foundational cultural and political differences. So he argues, for example, that both the Western nations and China might be persuaded to agree on less regulation for the Internet at its basic levels (physical infrastructure, TCP/IP protocols, etc.) rather than more, despite the radical differences between them – simply because agreements on sharing identical infrastructures at these base levels are economically less expensive for all participating parties. If there is to be regulation, he argues – especially as based on political or moral concerns specific to a given country – such regulation can be carried out more effectively and economically at the "upper" levels of the Web and the Net, namely at the layers of applications, etc.

There is certainly warrant in praxis for this approach. For example, China has agreed to the Human Subjects Protections endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as required for medical research, even though these protections are quite alien to the philosophical foundations of Chinese cultures and earlier medical practices. The motivation for accepting these protections was simple: the World Trade Organisation (WTO) made acceptance of these protections a requirement for joining the WTO, as China did in 2001 (Döring, 2003). In addition, as we will see below, shared economic interests are driving China and other Asian nations to move towards at least limited but nonetheless recognisable conceptions of privacy and data privacy protection, despite radical differences with the assumptions and values that underlie Western notions of privacy and data privacy protection.

Similarly, as Dan Burk (2007) points out, the (comparatively) rigorous Data Privacy Protection requirements of the European Union (EU) have managed to spread around the world – including into non-Western cultures – in what he characterises as "viral" fashion. Quite simply, the EU privacy protections include the stipulation that EU countries may not share personal information with countries outside the EU unless those countries also ensure data privacy protections equivalent to those specified in the EU Data Privacy Protection Acts. Very simply, if countries outside the EU want to enjoy the economic benefits of trade with the EU, insofar as such trade entails the sharing of private data, those countries are then required to meet the EU data privacy protection standards (Burk, 2007). Again, as Søraker (2006) has suggested, pragmatic concerns – including economic self-interest – may motivate diverse countries and individuals to agree upon a shared set of standards, despite their radical differences.

Finally, we may expect a global ICE to include agreements on identical values and standards because globalisation – as fuelled by ICTs themselves – fosters a cultural hybridisation and the creation of "third identities" (i.e. syntheses of two distinct cultural values, practices, beliefs, etc.) that represent precisely a shared, global identity. One of the clearest examples of such a third identity is again in the domain of privacy. As a number of commentators have observed, young people in Asian countries – specifically Japan, Thailand and China – increasingly insist on a Western-like practice of individual privacy, one that directly contradicts traditional Asian notions (see Nakada & Tamura, 2005; Rananand, 2007; and Lü, 2005, respectively). Clearly, young people in these countries are influenced by their exposure to Western notions of individual privacy. And, coupled with the growing economic prosperity that makes individual privacy possible, they are coming more and more into agreement with their counterparts in the West. Insofar as there is a shared – indeed, identical – set of understandings and values surrounding notions of individual privacy in both East and West, then we may expect that a global ICE will be able to develop a single, (quasi-) universal set of norms and practices for protecting that privacy.

Towards resonance: Online Good Samaritans and a new Renaissance?

But is that all? What happens as the irreducible differences defining diverse cultures and identities are not eradicated or overshadowed by such hybridisations and homogenisations? Again, how can we craft a global ICE that will preserve such irreducible differences?

As I have suggested, our answers to this question depend in part on how far we believe we ought, need or want to go beyond pragmatic relationships, motivated primarily by economic self-interest, relationships that emphasise our shared

commonalities – and thus, how far we are prepared to engage "the Other" as Other, i.e. in ways that recognise, respect, indeed foster our irreducible differences.

To highlight the contrasts I see at work here, allow me to introduce what I believe is a central – and centrally important – model for encountering "the Other", namely the Japanese Buddhist and comparative philosopher Kitarō Nishida's understanding of *resonance*. This notion of resonance, we will see, is of interest in part because it represents a notion that is shared between such Western philosophers as Plato and Aristotle, and such Eastern philosophers as Confucius, and it is also found in Daoist and Buddhist traditions. As well, if our goal in the intercultural engagements made possible by ICTs in the electronic global metropolis is to take up relationships with "the Other" that seek to foster the irreducible differences that make these resonances possible, then we will find that our global ICE will look somewhat more complex – and demanding – than a global ICE based primarily on pragmatics and commonalities.

Nishida and resonance

Nishida (1988) draws on the language of German philosophy, so as to emphasise that our relationships with one another always take place across the difference of "absolute opposites" *(Entgegengesetzter)* if we are to preserve our identities as irreducibly distinct from one another. But obviously, if only sheer difference defines our relationship, then there will be no connection or unity *(Vereinigung)*. To describe human relationships as a structure that holds together both irreducible difference and relationship, Nishida turns to the term and concept of resonance.

How do we know "the Other" as absolute Other? In part:

> *... through the resonance* [hankyō] *of my personal behavior [with you] I can know you, and you can know me through the resonance of your personal behaviour [with me].*

This resonance clearly entails relationship, specifically a "speaking with one another" *(miteinander Reden)* and an "answering to one another". At the same time, however, this relationship sustains the irreducible differences required to keep our identities and awareness separate:

> *Even if I know the thoughts and feelings of the other human being – this is not a simple unification* [Vereinigung] *of me with the other human being: my consciousness and the consciousness of the other must remain absolutely distinct from one another.*

What emerges is the conjunction of what appears to be contradictory, i.e. connection alongside irreducible difference:

> *The mutual* [gegenseitige] *relationship of absolute opposites* [Entgegengesetzter] *is a resonant* [hankyō] *meeting or response. […] Here we encounter a unity of I and You and at the same time a real contradiction.*

Resonance and pluralism

It is important to note – especially for the philosophers and political scientists – that this notion of resonance is deeply implicated with the lengthy and extensive discussion of pluralism in both ethics and political philosophy. To begin with, as I have developed more fully elsewhere (Ess, 2006a), resonance and an affiliated pluralism are central to the work of eco-feminist Karen Warren (1990) and specifically the information ethics of Lawrence Hinman (1998). Similar notions of resonance emerge in contemporary political philosophy, most specifically in the work of Charles Taylor. Attempting to move beyond both a *modus vivendi* pluralism that "lets differences lie", i.e. tolerates difference by not insisting on connection, and John Rawls' notion of "overlapping consensus", Taylor seeks a stronger notion of connection in the face of difference – in part, as Madsen & Strong (2003:12) point out, as Rawls' notion still runs the risk of allowing radical difference to lead to the dehumanisation of "the Other". In order to fully accommodate difference, Taylor takes up a notion of complementarity understood as a coherency between two irreducibly different entities, where this coherency emphasises a positive engagement between these two as one side enhances and expands on the characteristics of the other. So Taylor (2002:191) says:

> *The crucial idea is that people can bond not in spite of but because of difference. They can sense, that is, that their lives are narrower and less full alone than*

in association with each other. In this sense, the difference defines a complementarity.

Moreover, this strong notion of resonance is not restricted to other human beings. We may further seek – or believe ourselves required to seek – such resonance with:

- The larger community, and/or
- The natural order, and/or
- Divinity (in so far as we believe it to exist)

Broadly speaking, the further we understand our interrelationship with "the Other" to extend, the more extensive our ethical obligations will become. Between Nishida and Taylor, then, we can discern models of resonance and complementarity for our engagements with "the Other" – whether in human, natural and/or divine form – that insist on preserving and fostering the irreducible differences that define our identities as distinct from one another. Simultaneously, they sustain relations that, ideally, foster the flourishing of all. In particular, in contrast with a Rawlsian approach that requires us, as it were, to leave our metaphysics – our cultural worldview and affiliated values, practices, etc. – at home before we seek to develop an overlapping consensus in the political sphere, as Soraj Hongladarom and I further develop these notions of resonance, harmony and pluralism, they allow us precisely to bring our metaphysics to the table of ethical discussion.

This understanding of the sorts of harmonies we are to strive for, moreover, is not restricted to Nishida's Buddhism and Taylor's political philosophy. On the contrary, as we have seen – and as we will explore still more fully below – such notions of harmony guide the ethical and political thought of a range of world traditions, including Aristotle, Confucian thought, African thought, and so on. At the same time, this emphasis on harmony is likewise a theme shared by contemporary virtue ethics, ecofeminism and environmental ethics. Hence these notions of resonance, complimentarity and harmony appear to offer a kind of ethical lingua franca that may serve as common grounds for a global ICE. But we will also see that the ethical demands and obligations these notions entail go well beyond those that follow from an initial – but minimal – emphasis on commonalities alone. These additional demands, that is, may be required of us as we seek to foster engagements with "the Other" via ICTs distributed globally in ways that preserve the irreducible differences at work in such resonant relationships.

In particular, these additional ethical requirements may emerge as necessary conditions for a global ICE that includes both shared norms and values, but precisely as these can be (rationally) endorsed from the perspective and standpoint of particular and distinct cultures and individuals. In the next section, I turn to the possible ways – first in theory and then in praxis – of developing such a global ICE, one that constructs a pluralism constituted by shared ethical norms and values alongside multiple interpretations or applications of these values, as refracted through – and thus reflecting and preserving – irreducibly different cultural traditions, practices, etc.

Ethical pluralism: West and East

Because the difficulty of developing an ethics that works across diverse cultures and traditions is an ancient problem, we should not be surprised to discover that the ancients in both Eastern and Western traditions have developed often highly sophisticated ways of resolving the apparently conflicting demands between agreement and difference. But what is striking – and, at the same time, heartening for those of us hoping for a global ICE that will conjoin shared norms with individual and cultural differences, including the differences between Eastern and Western traditions – is just that the ancient Western and Eastern solutions in fact closely resemble one another in several fundamental ways.

In the first part of this section, I explore these close resemblances – which I will eventually call their resonances and harmonies – as a way of bringing to the foreground, first at a theoretical level, central notions of judgment, pluralism, harmony and resonance as these appear to bridge Eastern and Western traditions in ways that, in turn, suggest that we may build a global ICE on such notions, and thereby progress towards the goal of an ICE that incorporates both shared norms as well as the irreducible differences that define individual and cultural identities. In the following section, I then turn to examples drawn from contemporary praxis, i.e. norms and values articulated in diverse instances of cross-cultural ICE, which thus make clear that ethical pluralism is not simply a theoretical possibility, but also a practical reality in an emerging global ICE.

Ethical pluralism West: Plato, Aristotle, **phronesis** *and "cybernetic pluralism"*

Both Plato and Aristotle, and subsequently Aquinas, responded to this complex requirement in at least two key ways. To begin with, Plato developed a view that I have characterised as "interpretive pluralism" (Ess, 2006a). On this view, as elaborated especially in *The Republic*, we may conjoin shared ethical norms with irreducible differences by recognising that diverse ethical practices may represent distinctive interpretations or applications of those shared norms. Such differences do not necessarily mean, as ethical relativists would argue, that there are no universally legitimate ethical norms or values; rather, such differences may mean only that a given norm or value is applied or understood in distinctive ways – precisely as required by the details of a given context as shaped by a particular tradition, cultural norms and practices.

So, for example, elderly persons suffering from kidney disease are treated differently in different cultures and places. In the US – at least for those able to afford health insurance with good coverage – such a person may reasonably expect to receive treatments such as kidney dialysis to sustain his or her life, despite their great expense, without restriction, for example as determined by age. In the UK, by contrast, the national healthcare system has imposed an upper age limit of 65 on patients for whom it will subsidise such treatments (Annis, 2006:310). Finally, in the harsh environment of the Canadian Arctic, at least early in this century, an elderly member of the community who was no longer able to contribute to the wellbeing of the Kabloona community might voluntarily commit a form of suicide (Boss, 2005:9f).

For the ethical relativist, these three different practices might be thought to demonstrate that there are no values or norms shared universally across cultures. Alternatively, however, we can also understand these three practices as three diverse interpretations, applications and/or judgments as to how to apply a single norm, namely the health and wellbeing of the community – in three very different environments and cultures. Quite simply, at least the well-to-do in the US can afford the health insurance that will provide kidney dialysis without age limit, while a nationalised health system, even in a relatively wealthy country such as the UK, would quickly go bankrupt unless it imposed limits on subsidised healthcare. Similarly, in the unforgiving environments of the Kabloona, the wellbeing of the community would be jeopardised if scarce resources were diverted to caring for those who no longer could contribute to the community. Hence such care is literally not affordable by the community, nor, apparently, expected by the individual.

Secondly, Aristotle builds on Plato's teaching in several ways, beginning with his notion of *pros hen* or "focal" equivocals. Such equivocals stand as linguistic middle grounds between a homogeneous *univocation* (which requires that a term should have one and only one meaning) and a pure *equivocation* (as a single term may have multiple but entirely unrelated meanings; for example, "bat" can refer both to a winged mammal and a wooden stick used in baseball). *Pros hen* or focal equivocals, by contrast, are terms with clearly different meanings that simultaneously relate or cohere with one another, as both point towards a shared or focal notion that anchors the meaning of each. Aristotle (*Metaphysics,* 1003b2–4; cf. 1060b37–1061a7) uses the example of "healthy" to illustrate his point: "… the term 'healthy' always relates to health (either as preserving it, or as producing it, or as indicating it, or as receptive of it". In his later elaboration on Aristotle's understanding of such equivocals, Aquinas (1969:13.5) illustrates the point more fully:

> *… there is the case of one word being used of two things because each of them has some order or relation to a third thing. Thus we use the word 'healthy' of both diet and passing water, because each of these has some relation to health in a man, the former as a cause, the latter as a symptom of it.*

So we could say, for example, that a particular diet is $healthy_{(1)}$ and good kidney functioning may also be said to be $healthy_{(2)}$, but the two terms are not univocals; that is, they do not have precisely the same meaning. On the contrary, with $healthy_{(1)}$ we mean that the diet contributes to the state of being healthy, while $healthy_{(2)}$ means that good kidney function is a reflection of the state of being healthy. At the same time, however, precisely because $healthy_{(1)}$ and $healthy_{(2)}$ refer to the same "state of being healthy" that, as a shared focal point, thus grounds their meanings. Their differences in meaning are thus conjoined with a coherence or connection alongside

these differences.[5] For Aristotle (as well as for Aquinas), this linguistic analysis is significant because language is assumed to reflect the structure of reality itself. In particular, Aristotle says rather famously that *being* itself is such a focal or *pros hen* equivocal: "… there are many senses in which a thing is said to 'be', but all that 'is' is related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and is not said to 'be' by a mere ambiguity" (*Metaphysics,* 1003a 33). That is, all things *are* – in ways that are both irreducibly different and yet at the same time inextricably connected with one another by way of reference to a single focal point.

For Aristotle, our ability to negotiate the complex ambiguities of *pros hen* equivocals is affiliated with a particular kind of practical judgment, which he calls *phronesis*. Just as we can recognise and appropriately utilise terms that hold different but related meanings, so *phronesis* allows us to discern what and how general ethical principles apply to diverse contexts, thereby making ethical decisions and actions possible. As Aquinas (in Haldane, 2003:91) puts it:

> *Practical reason [...] is concerned with contingent matters about which human actions are concerned, and consequently, although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter deviations [...] Accordingly, in matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all in respect of detail but only as to the general principles, and where there is the same rectitude in matters of detail, it is not equally known to all.*

This is to say: *phronesis* allows us to take a general principle (as the ethical analogue to the focal term ground two *pros hen* equivocals) and discern how it may be interpreted or applied in different ways in different contexts as the ethical analogues to the two *pros hen* equivocals (i.e. that are irreducibly different and yet inextricably connected). But what *phronesis* thereby makes possible is an ethical pluralism that recognises precisely that shared ethical principles and norms will necessarily issue in diverse ethical judgments and interpretations, as required by irreducibly different contexts defined by an extensive range of fine-grained details.[6]

Such ethical pluralism, finally, as engaging such structures of connection alongside irreducible difference, and as rooted in a *phronesis* that is precisely the cultivated, experientially informed ability to judge as to how to interpret and apply shared principles to diverse contexts, thereby carries us beyond Hinman's notion of "potential compatibility", and even Rawls' notion of overlapping consensus.

In fact, Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis,* and thus of ethical pluralism, is intimately connected with a central component of computation, namely *cybernetics*. Of course, most of us are familiar with the term – as originally developed by Norbert Wiener – as referring to the ability of computer systems to self-regulate and self-correct their processes through various forms of feedback mechanisms. What is apparently forgotten or unacknowledged, however, at least in more recent literature, is that "cybernetics" is derived from Plato's use of the *cybernetes.* The *cybernetes* is a steersman, helmsman or pilot, and Plato uses the *cybernetes* as a primary model of ethical judgment, specifically, our ability to discern and aim towards the ethically justified

[5] Aquinas's example apparently draws from Aristotle's discussion of *pros hen* equivocals in *The Topics*: "… 'healthy' means 'producing health' and 'preserving health' and 'denoting health' "(I.xv, 106b35–37). We should also note that there are important differences between the *pros hen* and analogical equivocals that both Aristotle and Aquinas make use of, but these differences, so far as I can see, are not significant for the current discussion.

[6] As I have pointed out earlier (Ess, 2004:164), *phronesis* for Aristotle is an excellence or virtue *(arete),* that consists in "a truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to the things that are good for human beings" (*Nichomachean Ethics,* VI.v.6). The Aristotle scholar, Werner Jaeger, describes Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* as "an habitual disposition of the mind to deliberate practically about everything concerning human weal and woe" (Jaeger, 1934:83, referring to 1140b4 and 220). We should further note that Aristotle again follows Socrates and Plato here, as Jaeger (1934:83) comments, "To Socrates *phronesis* had meant the ethical power of reason, a sense modeled on the common usage that Aristotle restores to its rights in the *Nicomachean Ethics*". Indeed, as we are about to see, Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis*, as it derives from Socrates, is thus allied with Plato's use of the *cybernetes* – the pilot or steersman – as an exemplar of ethical or moral judgment. For additional discussion of *phronesis* in recent ICE, see Dreyfus (2001) and Hinman (2004:61).

path in the face of a wide range of possible choices. So Plato has Socrates observe in *The Republic* (360e–361a; cf. *The Republic I*, 332e–c; VI, 489c):

> ... *a first-rate pilot* [cybernetes] *or physician, for example, feels the difference between the impossibilities and possibilities in his art and attempts the one and lets the others go; and then, too, if he does happen to trip, he is equal to correcting his error.*

"Cybernetics", then, means more originally the capability of making ethical judgments in the face of specific and diverse contexts, complete with the ability to self-correct in the face of error and/ or new information. This is to say, the *cybernetes*, as a model of ethical self-direction, thereby embodies and exemplifies the sort of ethical judgment that Aristotle subsequently identifies in terms of *phronesis;* i.e. precisely the ability to discern what general principles may apply in a particular context, and how they are to be interpreted to apply within that context as defined by a near-infinite range of fine-grained, ethically relevant details.

Given this conjunction between the *cybernetes* and *phronesis*, where *phronesis* is the ethical judgment capable of discerning what general principles may apply, and how they apply in diverse ways as required by diverse contexts, we can then meaningfully speak of a "cybernetic pluralism" in information and computer ethics. I thereby refer to precisely the ethical pluralism that follows from recognising the role of *phronesis*/ practical judgment in attempting to apply/ interpret/understand ethical norms in diverse ways (depending on specific circumstances and larger cultural frameworks), one that is self-correcting in primarily ethical, not simply informational ways.

Bridge notions with Eastern thought: Pluralism, harmony and resonance in Confucian thought

Happily, these notions of judgment and pluralism are by no means restricted to these ancient Western thinkers. On the contrary, similar notions are found throughout diverse religious and philosophical traditions including, for example, Islam (Eickelman, 2003), as well as Confucian thought. So Joseph Chan (2003:136) observes that, "insofar as the framework of *ren* [authoritative humanity or co-humanity[7]] and rites remains unchallenged, Confucians are often ready to accept a plurality of diverse or contradicting ethical judgments". Chan's description of this Confucian pluralism thus closely parallels the interpretive pluralism we have seen in Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas. In particular, Chan (2003:137) emphasises the point that a shared ethical norm – in the Confucian case, *ren* – precisely allows for a diversity of judgments as to how the norm is to be interpreted or applied in a given case:

> *If after careful and conscientious deliberation, two persons equipped with* ren *come up with two different or contradictory judgments and courses of action, Confucians would tell us to respect both of the judgments.*

Here we can see, then, that Confucian thought thus closely parallels especially Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis* and the affiliated understanding that a plurality of judgments are not only possible, but are in fact required by the application or interpretation of a given ethical norm across diverse circumstances and contexts. That is – just as Being and the Good, as refracted through *phronesis*, allow for a diversity of legitimate meanings, interpretations, applications – so *ren* allows for different, even contradictory judgments in Confucian thought.[8]

Metaphors of resonance, harmony as structure of pluralism: Connection alongside irreducible differences

These close similarities regarding basic understandings of judgment and pluralism, in fact, extend to the central metaphors used to describe such pluralisms. In particular, the German comparative philosopher Rolf Elberfeld has extensively described how the metaphors of harmony and resonance appear in both Western and Eastern traditions, beginning with Plato's

[7] See Ames & Rosemont (1998:30).

[8] Similarly, Prof. I.J. Mosala, in his address to our conference, noted that: "In culturally diverse communities it is quite likely that everybody will accept these [basic] principles [of information ethics], but the way that they strive to promote them could vary."

account of the role of music as critical to education in *The Republic* (401d). We can further note here that for Plato, justice itself emerges as the proportional harmony between the three distinct elements of the psyche or self (i.e. reason, spirit and appetite) – just as justice in the ideal city is likewise a proportional harmony between the three classes (e.g. *The Republic*, 443b–445b).

Turning to China, Elberfeld (2002) points out that music – specifically, musical harmonies – are centrally important to education, as described in the *Liji* (*Book of Rites,* 3rd century. BCE). In ways closely similar to Plato, harmony *(he)* or resonance *(ganying)* are incorporated in education as a means of perfecting – understood precisely as harmonising – the proper relationships, first of all between human beings. Such harmony, it is hoped, will then further extend between human beings and the larger order, as well as, finally, between earth and *T'ian* ("heaven"; better, "an inhering, emergent order negotiated out of the dispositioning of the particulars that are constitutive of it" (Ames & Rosemont, 1998:47). As is well-known, harmony *(he)* among these multiple spheres are the fundamental features and goals of classical Confucian ethics – what Elberfeld (2002:132–137) calls a "resonance ethics" *(Resonanz-Ethik)*.[9] The metaphors of resonance and harmony, moreover, are clearly structures of pluralism. That is, these notions explicitly entail structures of connection alongside, and in the face of, irreducible difference. Specifically, the Chinese term *ying* (resonance) means precisely "a conjunction *(Zugleich)* of unity *(Vereinigung)* and division *(Trennung)*" (Elberfeld, 2002:132).

Finally, Elberfeld (2002:137f) demonstrates that these understandings of harmony, resonance and a correlative ethical pluralism are found not only in Confucian thought, but also in both ancient and contemporary Daoism and Buddhism. And, as we have seen, the highly influential Japanese comparative philosopher Kitarō Nishida takes up the Japanese version of resonance *(hankyō)* as key to our knowing one another as human beings.

There is good reason to think, then, that theoretically these notions of pluralism and resonance may also be shared cross-culturally but, unlike simple commonalities, these notions further include the ability to articulate and preserve irreducible differences.

Examples of ethical pluralism in contemporary theories of information and computing ethics

Indeed, there are at least two examples of such pluralism operating in contemporary theoretical work, beginning with Terrell Ward Bynum's synthesis of the work of Norbert Wiener and Luciano Floridi, in what Bynum calls "flourishing ethics". He has argued that the ethics of both Wiener and Floridi converge towards the central values of contributing to human flourishing; advancing and defending human values (life, health, freedom, knowledge, happiness); and fulfilling "the great principles of justice" drawn from Western philosophical and religious traditions. In fact, Bynum further points out agreement on these central values in the ethics of such computer ethics pioneers as Deborah Johnson, Philip Brey, James Moor, Helen Nissenbaum, as well as in my own emphasis on using CMC technologies in ways that preserve, to use Hongladarom's distinction (1998; 2000; 2001), "thick" or local cultures (Ess, 2005).[10] In this way,

[9] We can further note here that while Plato's understanding of harmony in *The Republic* is focused on harmonies within the human being and then within the human community, Plato draws from the still older Pythagorean belief in "the harmony of the spheres", i.e. a kind of cosmic harmony thought to extend throughout the natural order as mathematically ordered in *musical* proportions. In this way, at least the larger philosophical background of what I have called Plato's interpretive or "cybernetic" pluralism thereby directly correlates with the Chinese notion of a "cosmic" harmony between humanity, earth and *Tian*.

[10] Soraj Hongladarom (1998; 2000; 2001) takes up Michael Walzer's (1994) distinction between "thick" and "thin" to suggest a model of global uses of CMC that holds both local or "thick" cultures (including local languages, practices, traditions, etc.) alongside a more global but "thin" culture, including the use of English as a lingua franca that makes global communication and interaction possible while, nonetheless, thereby preserving the irreducible differences that define specific cultures. I have incorporated this model in my own work, so as to highlight additional examples from CMC usage around the globe that complement and reinforce Hongladarom's original model, as developed initially in the context of his analysis of Thai chatroom behaviour. I am further

these central values serve as contemporary examples of *pros hen* foci – of norms that may be shared across a wide range of thinkers and contexts, thereby issuing in an ethical pluralism that allows for considerable diversity in the interpretation and application of those norms.

Similarly, Luciano Floridi has developed more recently a conception of what he calls a "lite" information ontology, precisely with a view to avoiding cultural imperialism, on the one hand (resulting from unilaterally and homogeneously applying a single ethical framework across all cultures), while also avoiding, on the other hand, a merely relativist insistence on a local framework only, one that would thereby remain fragmented and isolated from other cultures and frameworks, as the effort to preserve their irreducible differences would (mistakenly) insist on avoiding all shared, putatively universal norms and values. So Floridi (2006:113) says:

> *First, instead of trying to achieve an impossible "view from nowhere", the theory seeks to avoid assuming some merely "local" conception of what Western philosophical traditions dictate as "normality" – whether this is understood as post-18th century or not – in favour of a more neutral ontology of entities modelled informationally. By referring to such a "lite" ontological grounding of informational privacy, the theory allows the adaptation of the former to various conceptions of the latter, working as a potential crosscultural platform. This can help to uncover different conceptions and implementations of informational privacy around the world in a more neutral language, without committing the researcher to a culturally laden position.*

A "lite" ontology, that is, can serve as a shared framework that allows precisely for a pluralistic diversity of understandings and applications of a shared notion of informational privacy, as, in effect, the focal, *pros hen* notion referred to by specific understandings and implementations of privacy within specific – and irreducibly different – cultural settings. Indeed, Floridi (2006:113) makes explicit here that his notion of a "lite" ontology is intended precisely to avoid the cultural imperialism of imposing a single norm, language or culture across the globe. Rather, his vision is of a pluralistic structure of a shared framework – in this case, information ontology as something of a shared language – alongside the diverse languages and practices of diverse cultures:

> *No universal language or culture should be expected to arise across all the various information societies around the world. However, in the same way as people will increasingly often speak not only their own idioms and native dialects but also some form of basic English good enough to communicate with each other, likewise, an informational ontology will probably represent the shared* koiné *among future netizens.*

The suggestion that the pluralism intended by Floridi's "lite" informational ontology requires our fluency in (at least) two "languages" – i.e. our own native language, along with a globally shared *koiné* – thereby echoes the similar point made by Brenda Danet and Susan Herring. As the history of cultural hybridisation shows, people are indeed capable of the linguistic *diglossia* required to maintain both a local language (and with it, given the integral role of language in defining and articulating a culture's worldview, values, practices, etc.) and a more formal lingua franca used for broader communication (Danet & Herring, 2003). Moreover, Floridi further echoes here Soraj Hongladarom's strategy of applying Michael Walzer's distinction between "thick" and "thin" to a develop a model of global uses of CMC technologies that, as we have seen, conjoins both local but "thick" cultures (including defining languages, values, practices, etc.) with a global but "thin" culture (including the use, for example, of English as a lingua franca) – so that the global, "thin" culture facilitates global communication and interaction, while allowing local, "thick" cultures to continue to thrive and develop (Hongladarom, 1998; 2000; 2001). More specifically, we will in fact see in praxis the sort of pluralism Floridi outlines here in theoretical terms, precisely with regard to the notion of privacy.

So, while these prominent theorists have thus incorporated strong notions of pluralism into their approaches to ICE, the critical question remains: Can this pluralism work in praxis, i.e. "on the ground" in an emerging ICE? Happily, a number of important examples instantiate such

very grateful indeed to Terry Bynum for confirming account of his work that I provide here as an example of pluralism (personal email to the author, 27 September 2005).

pluralisms in praxis. I review these in the next section, to illustrate how pluralism works "on the ground" – and that pluralism is not simply a nice theoretical construct, but a realisable component of real-world ethics.

Ethical pluralism in a global ICE: Examples from praxis

Emancipation across culture and gender

Building on his previous work (Stahl, 2004), Bernd Carsten Stahl has more recently developed an account of what he calls "critical reflexivity" as a procedurally oriented approach to ICE (Stahl, 2006). Here he addresses the wide range of philosophical problems, including the twin problems of ethical relativism and ethical absolutism, which confront any effort to develop ethical norms to be shared across cultures. Stahl thereby seeks to make possible what he calls "critical research in information systems" (CRIS), which is research intended precisely for a world made up of dynamic cultures interconnected with one another through ICTs and the processes of globalisation. As neither relativistic nor naively imperialistic, CRIS rather seeks to become critically aware of potentially ethnocentric assumptions in any efforts towards emancipation and development, precisely in order to avoid imperialism. In so doing, Stahl takes up the central difficulties of defining "emancipation" in a way that would work cross-culturally. This requires, on his showing, a shift from what we might think of as a content-oriented or substantive approach that would attempt to develop a concrete definition of emancipation. Any such effort, he points out, will always run the risk of overlooking – or, worse, overriding – local cultural preferences and values. Instead, Stahl (2006: 105) turns to a formal approach (one rooted in Habermas) that emphasises creating "procedures that allow the individuals or groups in question to develop their own vision of emancipation or empowerment". Such a procedural approach, Stahl argues, has the advantage that "the critical researcher will not prescribe certain features that she believes to be emancipatory, but that she gives the research subjects the chance to define their version of emancipation". This means more particularly that critical researchers can endorse democratic participation, freedom of speech, and/or stakeholder inclusion. As Stahl points out: "These do not constitute emancipation but they are the necessary conditions of determining what emancipation means."

Critical reflexivity, as Stahl makes clear, thus requires of us constant reflection on our own basic norms, assumptions, practices, etc., precisely as they appear to differ from those norms, assumptions, practices, etc. that define the cultures of "the Other". Such critical reflexivity is needed, first of all, in order to avoid naive ethnocentrism in the form of a presumed universality of our own norms, assumptions, practices, etc., and thereby avoid the imperialism and colonialism that such ethnocentrism often fuels.

Such critical reflexivity and its allied procedural approach to defining central norms, moreover, directly issues in a pluralism that recognises and respects the irreducible differences defining individual and cultural identities. Stahl (2006: 105) sees such pluralism emerging from the application of this procedural approach to debates regarding government and the democratic uses of ICTs. Even more strikingly, Deborah Wheeler (2006) documents how women in Jordan have been able to take up ICTs in ways that are indeed emancipatory – where "emancipation", precisely as Stahl describes, emerges from the agency of local actors who seek to determine the meanings and practices of "emancipation" that make sense and work best within their specific cultural frameworks and real-world contexts. In my terms, Stahl's critical reflexivity and procedural approach to defining central norms such as emancipation here thus issues – not simply theoretically but also practically – in "emancipation" as a pluralistic concept, one that allows for diverse interpretations and implementations across different cultures.

Maja van der Velden: "Encoding pluralism" in Indymedia

Maja van der Velden has helpfully documented how a robust form of pluralism has emerged in the development of independent media – specifically in the form of software written to support open, Web-based publishing.

Van der Velden (2007:86) first points out how the Confederated Network of Independent Media Centres (CNIMC) developed as a loose conglomerate devoted to supporting its members

around the world in their efforts to develop independent media oriented towards social, environmental and economic justice. The members of the CNIMC agree upon a shared set of "Principles of Unity", including the principle of open publishing:

> *All IMCs, based upon the trust of their contributors and readers, shall utilize open web based publishing, allowing individuals, groups and organizations to express their views, anonymously if desired.*

This principle, however, allows for – in fact, as the diverse contexts and settings in which participants seek to realise this principle require – diverse interpretations, applications or understandings of the principle. Indeed, the very source code written to support their work instantiates a plurality of such interpretations and applications. As Van der Velden (2007:86–87) describes it:

> *The first source code,* Active, *was developed by activists in Australia to run a small activist media center. In the same year, the software was adapted and used for the independent media center in Seattle, Washington, during the activities surrounding the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in 1999. The success of the media center in Seattle led to the establishment of many more Independent Media Centers.*

Perhaps not surprisingly, however, as the *Active* source code was taken up in diverse countries, cultures and contexts, it was modified to reflect local conditions, including specific legal contexts:

> *For example,* Mir *[an instantiation of* Active*] was developed for the German IMC site, reflecting "a legal environment which prohibits racist, hateful, and revisionist speech in ways that necessitates prior restraint story moderation in a way that many IMCs are uncomfortable with" (Hill, 2003, p. 5). Other spinoffs dealt with the authentication process.* Active *had no authentication process, allowing anonymous postings. This is still possible with IMC software such as* DadaIMC. *Other IMC softwares now require a name, while some also allow you to post under a nickname.*

The result is an ethical pluralism at the level of source code:

> *What the variety of IMC source codes shows is that there are different interpretations of open publishing possible within the Principles of Unity. These interpretations are politically motivated and "grant us a meaningful form of freedom, the independence to choose the socio-technical terms on which we communicate" (Hill, 2003, p. 8). The ongoing negotiations in the Indymedia network in order to balance unity, difference, and autonomy show that part of these negotiations need to be expressed on the level of the source code, the software programs on which the individual IMCs run. New participants in the Indymedia network can choose which source code serves their values best or develop a new one.*

Again, the emergence of diverse understandings of what open publishing means nicely fits with the structure of interpretive pluralism and *pros hen* equivocals. Open publishing, in particular, and the Principles of Unity, in general, stand as ethical focal points of diverse groups in different cultural and legal environments. These groups, in turn, are able to interpret and instantiate what these norms and values mean within those environments, precisely in order to make these values and norms applicable to, and workable within, those environments.

Pluralism in definitions of privacy – US, Germany, Hong Kong and China

As I have documented extensively elsewhere (Ess, 2006a), a similar pluralism is emerging – again, on a global scale and across the significant cultural differences defining East and West – with regard to the basic notion of privacy and affiliated codes and laws defining data privacy protection. Briefly (but in ways we will explore more fully in the next example), Western conceptions of privacy and data privacy protection rest on a generally atomistic conception of the individual as a moral autonomy (in Kantian terms, the source of its own law – a foundational conception of Western democratic theory). In the US, as Deborah Johnson (2001) has nicely summarised, we have developed justifications of privacy as both an intrinsic good (i.e. one that requires no further justification) and an extrinsic or instrumental good. First of all, privacy is needed for the autonomous self in order to develop a sense of self and personal autonomy, along with intimate relationships, and then the capacity to engage in debate and the other practices of a democratic society.

In contrast with what Henry Rosemont Jr (2006) helpfully characterises as this "peach-pit" conception of the individual (i.e. as holding a central, core reality-identity that does not change over time, whatever happens to the surface appearances of the person), Buddhist and Confucian (as well as African, as we have seen) conceptions of the self instead stress the person as a relational and/or "processional" being (Ames & Rosemont, 1998:22ff). In particular, in the case of Buddhism, the "peach-pit" or autonomous "self" foundational in the modern West is seen not simply as an illusion but, indeed, as the central delusion that is responsible for human suffering. Hence, in societies deeply shaped by Buddhism, such as Thailand and Japan, individual "privacy" is seen negatively.

So, for example, Japan's *Jodo-shinsyu* (Pure Land) Buddhism emphasises *Musi*, "no-self", as one of the goals of the religious practitioner. One way to achieve *Musi* – which means to purify and then eliminate one's "private mind" – is to voluntarily share one's most intimate and shameful secrets. That is, what is seen in the West as a core, positive reality, with which are affiliated positive rights to privacy, is seen in the case of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism as a deceptive illusion, whose "privacy" is best – and voluntarily – overturned for the sake of genuine salvation (Nakada & Tamura, 2005).

In the light of these radical differences, we should expect equally radical differences with regard to conceptions of data privacy protection. To be sure, these differences clearly exist. At the same time, at least limited privacy rights and data privacy protections are emerging in Thailand, China and Hong Kong, but justified, as we might imagine, on entirely different grounds than we find in the West. Briefly, at least limited data privacy protection is justified primarily on economic grounds: in ethical terms, such protection is seen as an instrumental good – one that contributes to economic development as online commerce becomes increasingly important in these economies. In this way, we again see a pluralistic, *pros hen* structure emerge.

Privacy and data privacy protection serve as the ethical focal points towards which both Western and Eastern societies orient their laws, but each society understands and interprets the meaning of privacy and data privacy protection in ways that fit its specific context, traditions, values, norms, practices, and so on (Ess, 2006a).[11]

Hongladarom: Theravadan and Mahayanan Buddhist approaches to privacy vis-à-vis modern Western notions of individual privacy

More recently, Soraj Hongladarom has taken up these apparent conflicts between Western and Eastern conceptions, with particular attention to the Buddhist traditions (Theravadan and Mahayanan) that have deeply shaped and defined Thai society. To begin with, he extends our understanding of the contrasts between Western and Eastern views by taking up Nagasena's refutation of the psyche – the Greek conception of a unifying "soul" or self that synthesises diverse components of sense knowledge (sight, taste, touch, hearing, smell) into a unitary experience (Hongladarom, 2007:116ff). While this appears to radicalise the contrast between Western and Eastern views, Hongladarom goes on to point out that Western traditions also include more relational or communitarian approaches that somewhat offset the "peach-pit" notion with an emphasis on one's relationships with the larger community. As we have seen, these approaches include Aristotle's virtue ethics, feminist ethics and ethics of care, environmental ethics and, finally, communitarian traditions since Hegel (cf. Tu, 1999; Froehlich, 2004).

At the same time, Hongladarom shows how Nagarjuna develops a distinction between empirical-conventional reality, on the one hand, and ultimate reality on the other hand. Given this distinction, Buddhism is perfectly capable of endorsing and taking the individual self as real – at the empirical-conventional level. Indeed, the Buddhist striving towards enlightenment (*nirvana*, the "blown-out" self) requires individual effort and responsibility – manifest, for example, in the injunction to cultivate compassion towards others (Hongladarom, 2007:118). For Hongladarom, this means that Buddhist societies such as

[11] Kei Hiruta has developed an extensive analysis and helpful critiques and suggestions to my earlier work on pluralism (Hiruta, 2006). I have attempted to acknowledge the saliency of those critiques in the development of this chapter – primarily by shifting away from the political justifications that he finds problematic.

Thailand have a prima facie reason to protect the privacy of such (empirical-conventional) individuals, especially as part of a movement towards establishing a more democratic society. That is, the Buddhist injunction, in which each person is responsible for his or her own liberation, thereby sustains notions of equality and democracy that are at least closely similar to those developed and endorsed in Western societies.

In my terms, there emerges here yet again an interpretive pluralism regarding conceptions of the self and privacy as *pros hen*, ethical focal points, as these are interpreted and understood across the considerable divides between East and West. To say it slightly differently: the irreducible differences marking the contrast between modern Western notions of the self (as an ultimate reality whose privacy is a positive good) and Buddhist conceptions of the self (as an empirical-conventional reality whose privacy requires at least a modest level of governmental protection, especially for the sake of democratic polity) can be seen as diverse interpretations or understandings of notions of self and privacy, and thereby as conceptions that may nonetheless resonate or harmonise with one another. Taken together with the previous examples of privacy East-West, the Thai example again marks out in praxis as well as in theory the possibility of a global ICE – one constituted by shared ethical focal points (i.e. shared norms, values, etc.) that are nonetheless articulated and instantiated in diverse ways as these focal points are interpreted and applied in distinctive cultural contexts.

Indeed, the resonance emerging here complements similar alignments or harmonies across East and West, such as the one pointed out by Theptawee Chokvasin (2007:78f) between Buddhist versions of autonomy and Kantian and Habermasian notions. For our part, Hongladarom and I have suggested that this harmony further extends between the Buddhist notion of *Attasammapanidhi*, of ethical self-direction and self-adjustment, and Plato's model of the *cybernetes*, the pilot or steersman who symbolises a similar capacity for ethical self-correction (Hongladarom & Ess, 2007:xix). Finally, Hongladarom points out that Buddhist ethics closely resemble Western-style virtue ethics and the pragmatic ethics of Richard Rorty. Hongladarom's analysis thus identifies and reinforces a further deep resonance between Western and Eastern thought, namely between Western virtue ethics (whether in Socratic, Aristotelian and/or contemporary feminist forms) and the ethical systems of Confucian thought and Buddhism.

Finally, these various structures of pluralism – precisely as they require the interpretation or application of a shared focal norm or value within the diverse contexts established by distinctive cultural values, traditions, practices, etc. – distinguish our approach from Rawls' (2005) notion of "overlapping consensus" in a political liberalism. For Rawls, we may arrive at such a consensus by bracketing our diverse metaphysical beliefs – leaving them at home, so to speak – and engaging with our fellow citizens simply on the basis of what is politically expedient. Moreover, Rawls' account focuses on what takes place within a liberal state. By contrast, our conception of ethical pluralism extends globally and includes states and regimes that are clearly not liberal or democratic. Despite these radical cultural and political differences, however, we believe that the sorts of focal, *pros hen* pluralism that we have articulated make possible ethical alignments – indeed, resonances and harmonies – between diverse cultural traditions and ethical systems. In such pluralistic resonances or harmonies, as we (Hongladarom & Ess, 2007:xv) have put it most recently:

> *... these diverse systems and traditions do not have to leave their metaphysics at home; on the contrary, they bring their specific backgrounds to the table of philosophical dialogue and debate and search for ways in which their systems could or could not be aligned with the others. In the case of personal privacy, this would mean that the Buddhist tradition and the Western secular tradition compare and contrast their similarities and differences without (echoing Michael Walzer, 1994) each leaving its thick backgrounds and operating with its fellows on thin air.*

Emerging rights/duties?

In the light of the theoretical foundations and practical expressions of *pros hen* or focal pluralism in an emerging and genuinely global ICE, what conclusions can we draw regarding the rights and obligations that may emerge therein "for the rest of us", as we take up ICTs more and more into the fabric of our lives? I can see three layers of responses to this question.

Conflict arising from irreducible differences is inevitable and not always resoluble

The possibility of pluralistic resolutions to ethical conflicts emerging from the irreducible differences defining individual and cultural identities is just that – possibility. While we have now seen multiple instances which realise the possibility of resolving ethical differences within the resonance or harmony articulated by a *pros hen*, interpretive pluralism – manifestly, not all such conflicts will allow for such resolutions. So, for example, Dan Burk (2007) documents the intractable differences between US and European Union approaches to copyright, with the US, property-oriented approach currently dominating over the EU, author-oriented approach. Similarly, Pirongrong Ramasoota Rananand (2007) suggests that however much Buddhist approaches to privacy may resonate with Western ones being imported into Thailand, the tradition and affiliated customs of the "surveillance state" may succeed in keeping "privacy" an interesting idea, but not a right articulated and defended in law.

But, there is, to paraphrase Spivak (1999), no reason to throw up our hands or to acquiesce to ethical relativism and fragmentation (including reinforcement of local identities through violence). Rather, there are at least two ways in which an emerging ICE can respond to the irreducible differences defining distinctive cultural identities.

Minimal requirements – shared commonalities

As we have seen, it is possible to begin our encounters with one another globally via ICTs with the reasonable and understandable search for commonalities, including a set of minimal rights and obligations towards one another, justified at least by shared economic interests – what Søraker (2007) has helpfully identified as pragmatic arguments. So far as I can tell, what emerges from this approach is what Westerners will recognise as familiar but primarily negative obligations, such as don't violate another person's privacy, right to intellectual property, etc.; don't share passwords and/or hack where you don't belong; don't copy illegally, etc. That is – as Henry Rosemont Jr (2006) has made very clear – like first-generation rights to life, liberty and pursuit of property: I can respect your rights by largely leaving you alone.

To be sure, the terms "minimal" and "negative" may sound unnecessarily derogatory here. Hence, let me stress that arriving at – and following out – global agreements of these sorts would represent an enormous ethical advance forward in the emerging global ICE. Nonetheless, such minimal rights and negative obligations are only part of the story.

Maximal requirements: Meeting "the Other" online

More broadly, as I tried to suggest by posing the question towards the end of the opening section, our emerging and global ICE depends very much on how far we want/will/need/ought to go in meeting "the Other" online. Presuming that we seek to meet with and engage "the Other" in a more robust way – i.e. one defined by our willingness to acknowledge not only commonalities, but also the irreducible differences that define our individual and cultural identities – we are apparently required to move to a more complex mode of thinking and behaving, one shaped precisely by the structures of pluralism and harmony, as these hold together both similarity and irreducible difference.[12] Given our desire and/or need to move in these more robust directions, we can perhaps draw at least initial guidance from the following considerations.

Crosscultural communication ethics?

While much is known about crosscultural communication offline – astonishingly little is known

[12] Herdin et al. (2007:65) make this same point in developing their model of cultural connection and difference: "Cultural thinking that reconciles the one and the many is achievable only on the basis of an integration and differentiation way of thinking. It integrates the differences of the manifold cultural identities and differentiates the common as well." They see such structures of connection and difference at work in Welsch's (1999) notion of transculturalism, Robertson's (1992) well-known notion of glocalisation, and in the cultural hybridisation represented in the "new *mestizaje*", a term coined by Burke (in Wieviorka, 2003).

about crosscultural communication online, including the centrally important task of "building bridges" across cultures.[13] To be sure, we can learn lessons from successful efforts at such bridge-building. As we have seen, Bernd Carsten Stahl (2006), for example, emphasises the importance of *critical reflexivity*, a constant reflection on our own basic beliefs, views, practices, etc., as these differ from those of "the Other", if we are to avoid naive ethnocentrism. More broadly, two of the most important factors of successful crosscultural communication that sustains the irreducible differences defining individual and cultural identities are trust and the ability to recognise and respond effectively to the linguistic ambiguity that thereby allows for a pluralistic understanding of basic terms and norms as holding different interpretations or applications in diverse cultures (Ess & Thorseth, 2006).

Such pluralism allows precisely for a structure of both shared commonalities and irreducibly different understandings and practices that emerge from our distinctive cultures. Thereby, pluralism and ambiguity are necessary conditions for crosscultural encounters with one another that preserve these irreducible differences as part of the resonance that describes such engagements. Unfortunately, these dimensions of trust, ambiguity and resonance may be hindered rather than fostered by online environments (cf. Søraker, 2006; Grodzinsky & Tavani, 2007).

[13] To my knowledge, the most important effort in this direction is the extensive annotated bibliography developed by Leah Macfadyen and her colleagues (Macfadyen et al., 2004). So far as I am aware, however, no one has developed a comprehensive, systematic and theoretically grounded set of guidelines and best practices for crosscultural communication online that would match the extensive literature on offline crosscultural communication. In Ess (2006b), I attempt to summarise such guidelines on the basis of recent work from the biennial conferences on "Cultural Attitudes towards Technology and Communication" (CATaC), but these guidelines are oriented exclusively towards website design. In the conclusion here, I attempt to offer some general guidelines that would extend to other online venues of crosscultural communication. But while these guidelines and suggestions, I hope, are helpful, much clearly remains to be done to develop a literature for online crosscultural communication that begins to compare with the detail and scope of the literature for offline crosscultural communication.

Moreover, these elements of human communication finally require the now familiar work of *judgment* – beginning with judgments as to how far or close one's meaning is understood by "the Other" and, in turn, how far one understands the meanings of "the Other". Even though we may use the same word or term, their differences in our diverse cultural settings require such careful attention and judgment to determine whether or not we are sliding into equivocation and misunderstanding. But, earning and sustaining trust, successfully recognising and comfortably negotiating linguistic ambiguities, and utilising the needed judgment in establishing and sustaining resonant relationships that preserve our irreducible differences – these capacities are not easily captured in analytical frameworks, much less taught in any formal way. They can, of course, be learnt, as humans have always learnt them, through example and experience with *embodied* teachers – but this again means that the most important elements of successful crosscultural communication may not be best learnt in the *disembodied* context of contemporary online venues (cf. Dreyfus, 2001).

Social justice and positive duties: Information justice and the cultivation of character?

A number of observers have argued that the rights-based approaches of the West will not work well in other cultures. Such approaches, as we have now seen in multiple ways, emphasise the autonomous individual, apart from his or her connection with the larger community. Such an approach is deeply out of sync with the basic assumptions regarding the individual as a relational being first and foremost, which shape the more communitarian/collectively oriented cultures and traditions of Africa, indigenous peoples, those countries shaped by Confucian and Buddhist traditions, and so on. In particular, Maja van der Velden (2007:83) concludes her chapter in our anthology precisely by pointing out that "designing so as not to hurt Others" means going beyond rights-based approaches.

For his part, Hongladarom (2007:120f) argues that the more radical Buddhist solution to the problem of protecting privacy is not simply to erect laws and create technological safeguards. Rather, it is to attack the root cause of our

motivations to violate privacy in the first place, namely egoism and its affiliated greed. Similarly, Lynette Kvasny (2007) has argued that if we in the US genuinely seek to overcome the digital divide (as it affects, for example, African American communities), we must come to grips with the evil of systemic racism. Such racism, she argues, is embedded in the very statistics and demographic categories used by otherwise well-meaning academics and policy makers in attempting to document the digital divide for the sake of overcoming it. Indeed, one of the contributors to our volume on East-West information ethics – a Thai computer scientist – has argued that in the face of the social and familial fragmentation effected by ICTs, what is needed to raise a new generation of young people who will use these technologies in ethical rather than harmful ways is a restoration of religion as an environmental framework (Bhattarakosol, 2007).

These prescriptions, no doubt, will sound odd to Western ears – in part, I suggest, because our mainstream ethical traditions have tended to separate ethics from religion first of all (as they must in the modern Western liberal state), and secondly, because our ethical systems tend to emphasise following a minimum of rules that articulate obligations to others, precisely in the name of preserving individual (and largely negative) freedoms. Nonetheless, a global ICE that seeks to move beyond shared commonalities (and comparatively negative) requirements will apparently call upon us to take up a range of positive obligations and duties, if we are to preserve irreducible differences while simultaneously engaging in dialogue with "the Other".

Happily, these positive obligations and duties are not entirely foreign to the Western traditions. Especially ancient and contemporary feminist virtue ethics and ethics of care move us in these directions, as do the deontological ethics of Kant and others. But let me close by suggesting that, at the risk of violating copyright and trademark – a major US software company has asked the right *ethical* question when it comes to ICTs:

Where do you want to go today?

As we work, individually and collectively, and especially cross-culturally to develop a global ICE, part of our response, as I hope I have shown with some clarity, depends on how we respond to a second question:

How far am I prepared to go today – i.e. how well am I prepared to take up relationships with "the Other" that entail not simply comparatively straightforward commonalities and pragmatic agreements, but further entail the difficult efforts to understand and negotiate ambiguity and irreducible difference, precisely in the name of preserving individual and cultural differences – perhaps, as Paterson argues, even preserving the environment where such negotiations will require the skills – learnt only slowly and over a lifetime – of judgment, and the cultivation of compassion and care?

Again, the cultivation of such virtues is not entirely alien to Western traditions. On the contrary, I have argued elsewhere, echoing in part the work of Cees Hamelink (2000), for the necessity of an education that fosters Socratic critical thinking and moral autonomy, as key to moving beyond one's own culture towards a more encompassing understanding of a wide diversity of cultures – a movement captured in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave", and further exemplified in our notions of Renaissance women and men who attain multiple cultural, linguistic and communicative fluencies that allow them to comfortably live and work with "Others" around the globe. *Contra* "cultural tourists" and "cultural consumers" whose ethnocentrism may only be reinforced rather than challenged by their online engagements, such a Socratic-Renaissance education would further foster, following Habermas and feminism, an empathic perspective-taking and solidarity with one's dialogical partners, including our sister and fellow *cosmopolitans* (world citizens).[14] Of course, such education aims towards the development of *phronesis*, the practical wisdom required to negotiate the multiple contexts of ethics and politics, with the goal of achieving *eudaimonia*, human contentment, and harmony in one's own society and the larger world (Ess, 2004:164).

In terms that have emerged here, such an education would further highlight the importance of moving beyond pragmatic commonalities and shared economic interests to the pluralism of

[14] That Habermas may be salient in an African context is, in fact, argued by conference participant Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani, in his contribution titled, "The public sphere's metamorphosis: The triangular relation between the NGO, the state and globalisation".

the *cybernetes*, the one who is able to discern what ethical course to pursue in a specific context – including the often radically diverse contexts of irreducibly distinct cultures – and who is able to correct errors when they are made. Resonant with Socratic, Aristotelian and feminist virtue ethics, such an education would further seek to foster the virtues of compassion and care. Such compassion and care, after all, are essential to healing the ruptures that follow on the mistakes we will inevitably make, especially in our first efforts to understand, work and live with "the Other" – and, most especially, as we venture out into new linguistic and cultural settings. Such compassion and care, finally, are essential to building and sustaining the trust essential to all human interactions.

While such an education for exemplary persons (to use the Confucian phrase) may be desirable, it is clearly a rare privilege, if not still largely a utopian ideal. Hence, I do *not* want to argue that everyone must take this second step. To echo Judith Jarvis Thomson's (1971) famous distinction between "minimally decent" and "Good Samaritan" ethics, the latter requirements – at least here and now – strike me as morally admirable (what ethicists like to call *supererogatory*) values and acts, but not morally *necessary* or required. That is, while we can establish such duties and goals as exemplary, we cannot require them of everyone – first of all, because to fulfil these duties may exceed the resources and opportunities of many persons, especially as they depend on an education and experience with "the Other" (such as living for an extended period of time outside one's own country), which remain luxuries rather than everyday practice for the majority of the world's peoples.

That said, ICTs continue their apparently inexorable expansion throughout the world – meaning, they are taken up by more and more people in diverse cultural contexts and settings. It seems certain that if we are to avoid a homogeneous world culture – what Benjamin Barber (1995) famously called "McWorld"[15] – more and more of us will need to take up the moral postures and communication skills of the Good Samaritan *cybernetes*, rather than simply pursuing commonalities, pragmatics and economic self-interest. Perhaps the dramatic scope and speed of crosscultural encounters made possible precisely by ICTs might help more and more people recognise the need for such exemplary ethics and cultivation of character. But such hopes, of course, must recognise the multiple ways in which most of our online engagements rather foster minimal obligations entailed by seeking out simply shared interests and pragmatic commonalities, especially as these engagements are oriented towards easy consumption.

Where do you want to go today?

Thus requires us to further ask:

Whom do you want to meet today –
"the Other" as s/he is like you,
and/or
"the Other" as s/he is both similar to you and irreducibly different?

And, finally, if the last:

> *What positive ethical virtues – practices, habits, postures, attitudes, etc. – must we cultivate in order to become the sort of person who can indeed thus meet "the Other"* qua *Other?*

Or, to recall Nishida:

> *What virtues must we practice, what sort of person must you become, in order to be capable of knowing "the Other" in a resonant meeting and response that conjoins commonalities with our acknowledging, respecting and fostering the irreducible differences that distinguish us (as individuals and as members of diverse cultures) from one another?*

I close by noting that these sorts of questions – along with the emphasis on judgment, pluralism and harmony in the larger community that they implicate – may well resonate in African contexts. As we have seen, such judgment and pluralism are found in Islam (Eickelman, 2003),

[15] Of course, a central focus during our conference was precisely the ways in which Africa and African cultures, in particular, are profoundly threatened by the homogenising forces of globalisation. This point was made with especial force by our colleagues in Theme Group 8, Ismail Abdullahi (Cultural diversity, globalisation and ethical issues), Anthony Löwstedt (Cultural extinction as an aspect of current globalisation trends) and Chibueze C. Udeani (Cultural diversity and globalisation).

and hence should be no strangers to the African countries and traditions deeply shaped by Islam. Moreover, we have further seen that African thought more broadly stresses that persons are "beings under construction" – in the terms of both Western virtue ethics and Confucian thought, it takes practice to become a more complete human being. By the same token, this practice is oriented towards the harmony of the larger community – again, a foundational understanding in Western virtue ethics and Confucian thought that appears to be perfectly resonant with African thought (Paterson, 2007:157f; cf. Capurro, 2007, on *ubuntu*).

These strong resonances between the ethical pluralism I have traced out in both Western and Asian traditions, on the one hand, and the broad outlines of African traditions and thought on the other hand, suggest – at least as a starting point – that this ethical pluralism may likewise succeed in the African context both to foster the development of shared ethical norms in the domain of information and computing ethics, and to sustain and foster the irreducible differences that define both individuals and cultures in Africa. Happily, I can report that much in our presentations and dialogues during the first African Information Ethics Conference – including the discussions and findings of our Theme Group on "Cultural diversity and development" – provided at least initial confirmation of this hypothesis.

But, of course, such pluralism requires precisely the dialogical participation of those who themselves stand in the cultural contexts and histories of Africa in any development of a pluralistic global ICE that would seek to discern and articulate shared norms that are, at the same time, interpreted, understood and applied in diverse ways by diverse individuals and communities, i.e. in ways that precisely and directly reflect, in this case, African values, traditions, histories, practices, etc. Given the scope of this ethical pluralism across a wide range of global and radically diverse cultures, and given the strong resonances between African traditions and the other traditions in which pluralism is now well documented, it seems very probable that this pluralistic approach will succeed in the African context as well. First of all, such pluralism would forbid both homogenisation and colonisation of the sort that has devastated Africa (as well as much of the rest of the world) for too much of her history. But as we have learnt in other contexts previously, we will only know if such a global, pluralistic ICE will "work" in Africa as our African colleagues seek to take it up in their own distinctive ways, as one approach among many in their development of an African information ethics.

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